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Skyscrapers of Rome

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Elizabeth B. Condie, "Skyscrapers of Rome" (April 28, 2016). *Young Historians Conference*. Paper 17.
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Skyscrapers of Rome

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26 April 2016

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5 January 2016

Skyscrapers of Rome

Scattered across modern Europe are the crumbling remnants of a once-sprawling empire. Though they may not look as impressive today, they are proof of the power of the ancient Roman Empire. In Rome alone lie the Coliseum, the Roman Forum, and the Pantheon, all unique and significant structures constructed by and for powerful Roman Emperors. The Arch of Titus and the Res Gestae of Augustus are found outside of Rome, attesting to the vast expanse of the Empire. Each of these architectural wonders honors the divine nature of one of Rome's great Emperors. Although many factors went into the design of Roman Architecture, displaying the Emperor's divine power, maintaining political and military authority, and showing the advancement of Roman Architecture was the ultimate purpose.

Many different styles of architecture sprang from the Roman Empire: Etrusco- Roman Architecture, Italic Architecture, Republican Architecture, Hellenistic Architecture, Classicistic Architecture, and Imperial Architecture (Robinson 107). These different styles of Architecture were used in the blueprints of homes, in the Republican style, to ornate temples in the Hellenistic style. Etrusco-Roman Architecture came from the Etruscans, who migrated from Asia minor to the Italy. During this early style, arches and columns became prominent, creating the base for other architectural styles. The Republican style was used in designing large mansions in the later periods of ancient Rome. The front of most Republican homes featured several stories of

columns stacked onto each other, with long balconies along the front. Smaller homes and temples were often designed in the Italic style. With four brick or clay walls, most of these buildings looked like medieval churches, with extremely simple floor plans and plain interiors and exteriors. Hellenistic buildings were adorned with detail. Each column had different figures or reliefs that displayed the talent of the architect. However, the most grand and powerful architectural style is the Imperial, characterized by the architects' ability to manipulate enclosed space. The exterior was always large, square, and extremely plain by design. Often entrances had simple columns that gave way to exquisite interiors. Inside were large open areas and ceilings, usually free standing domes, symbolizing man at the center of the universe (Wixom 107). The domes were decorated with paintings, patterns, and carvings. Often these murals displayed complex patterns, highlighting the grandeur of the Roman Empire. Constructing both patterns and domes was extremely dangerous and labor-intensive. These buildings were predominantly constructed out of marble, granite, and other dense stone. This required many laborers to excavate the rock from the earth, transport it to the proper location, carve the columns or slabs according to the design, and carefully place the heavy rock into place without damaging it. Gold and other precious metals were inlaid in the patterns to decorate the interior. Mining and attaining these precious metals was also dangerous and labor intensive work (MacDonald 4). Most of the great buildings in the Roman Empire were designed in this Imperial style.

Roman Architecture was first used as a tool for displaying and maintaining power by Caesar Augustus, who ruled from 27 B.C.E. to 14 C.E. He gained power from his uncle and mentor, Julius Caesar, whom the Roman people viewed as a god. When Augustus came to power, he wanted to convince the Roman populace of his divinity and military power. He

ordered the construction of temples, forums, and other public buildings and spaces to intimidate enemies and remind the Roman people of his divine authority. The Senate House, the temple of Apollo in Palatine, the Forum of Julius, and the temple of Mars Ultor are just a few of Augustus' architectural projects used to accomplish this (Thayer 2). His obsession with power shows that Augustus was extremely conscious of his public image. He believed he could convince the Roman people that he was the ideal ruler through the use of Architecture and literature. Not only did he use huge temples to display his power, he also enlisted Virgil and other scholars to publish texts that present him in a divine and worthy light. Virgil wrote the Aeneid, in which he connects Augustus to the line of Aeneas, the founder of Rome, and continually praises Augustus for his divine wisdom and military might throughout the epic. Many of Augustus' successors followed his example, building massive structures such as the Colosseum, the Roman Pantheon, and the Arch of Titus.

During his reign, Caesar Augustus constructed many Roman buildings to display his divine power and exemplified Rome's architectural prowess. The Pantheon is a beautiful building which perfectly exemplifies the Imperial style. It was first built during Augustus's reign in 25 B.C., and later rebuilt after a great fire in 80 C.E. The entrance to the Pantheon was designed with a portico, held up by eight rows of columns. The pediment inscription glorifies Agrippa, the architect Augustus petitioned to design the Pantheon. Before reconstruction, the portico depicted a scene of the gods equipped in full Roman armor and riding in chariots, conquering the Titans (Wixom 265). Although this scene is no longer there, it would have made the gods look Roman, thereby attesting to the power of the Empire. (See Fig. 1) Through the entrance is a circular structure with a free standing dome ceiling, supported by a series of arches

placed into the dome itself. The Romans perfected the use of arches, and the Pantheon showed off Rome's mastery and manipulation of the arch. In order to place these arches, builders used massive wooden scaffolding to set the arches into place. An open circle at the center of the dome lets light into the temple. This light at the center of the dome symbolized Augustus, as the light of the people and the center of religion (MacDonald 110). On the inner walls of the Pantheon stood statues of the gods, as well as statues of both Augustus and Agrippa. (See Fig. 2) By placing himself amongst the gods, Augustus made himself look like a god who had the divine right to rule over Roman citizens. The Roman Pantheon was an amazing architectural development during Augustus's time pushing architectural limits to display Augustus' divine authority.

One of Augustus' greatest tools for displaying divine and military power was The Res Gestae of Augustus. Written in plain and simple speech, the text glorified the conquests and achievements of Augustus.

“*Rerum gestarum divi Augusti, quibus orbem terrarum imperio populi Rom. subiecit, § et impensa rem, quas in rem publicam populumque Romanum fecit, incisarum in duabus aeneis pilis, quae sunt Romae positae, exemplar subiectum*” (Thayer 3).

This can literally be interpreted as:

“Below is a copy of the acts of the Deified Augustus by which he placed the whole world under the sovereignty of the Roman people, and of the amounts which he expended upon the state and the Roman people, as engraved upon two bronze columns which have been set up in Rome.”

This introduction was placed atop the list of Augustus's achievements, such as peace at sea, food supply, expansion of the empire, and construction of buildings. Also, throughout the text, Augustus repeatedly states that the Senate and the people elected or persuaded him into power. It attempted to appeal to both the hearts and minds of the people, specifically highlighting the peace during Augustus' reign. Suna Güven states, "There is no mention of problems with the settlement of restless veterans, or some less than glorious incidents involving Augustus (then Octavian) and Antony." As military failures would tarnish his perfect military public image, Augustus manipulated the text to fit his desired reputation. In order to place Augustus in a divine light, the text omits unflattering events, though it does not falsify the events presented (Güven 32). It was first placed on the walls of the temples of Roman gods as well on the Temples of Augustus in Rome. However, as the Roman Empire expanded, the *Res Gestae* of Augustus was chiseled into the walls of both new and pre-existing temples to remind newly-conquered people of the power and majesty of Augustus. For example, in 31 B.C.E., the *Res Gestae* of Augustus was used to ensure local cooperation in Greece. The Greek people rebelled against Augustus. He crushed the rebellion and placed the *Res Gestae* of Augustus on their temple walls to remind them of his power. The text was strategically chiseled into the walls of temples to reiterate the glory of Augustus and to remind the people to honor him. As temples were places of worship, where one would submit to the gods' will, placing the *Res Gestae* of Augustus in the temples made Augustus a god in the eyes of the Roman people, and suggested to the people to submit to his will. He refocused temple worship away from the gods and onto himself. With both the Pantheon and the *Res Gestae* Augustus, Augustus displays his desire for extreme control over his

public image. The *Res Gestae* of Augustus was meant to persuade citizens of Augustus' peaceful reign, military might, and divine authority.

Augustus was not the only Roman Emperor to use architecture as a display of divine power. Vespasian constructed one of the most famous Roman buildings, the Coliseum. Vespasian, who ruled from 69 A.D. to 79 A.D., started the construction of the Coliseum, but it was later finished during the reign of his son, Titus. A giant amphitheater where people came to view gladiator fights and other competitions, the Coliseum is elliptical in shape, with a long axis. It stood four stories high, each story containing eighty arches. The first level of arches are in the Tuscan Doric style, characterized by their plain, but powerful design. These columns are the oldest style of columns from Greek Architecture, and were originally found on ancient temples, such as the Temple of Delians. Because of their age and strong design, these arches symbolized the power and stability of the Roman Empire. The second level of arches were elegant and slender in the Ionic style. At the top of each Ionic column lies a Volute, a spiral, scroll-like ornament. This ornate and detailed feature displayed the Roman's mastery of sculpting. The third level included delicate and decorative Corinthian arches, which were originally Greek, but were first changed into a more Roman style in the temple of Mars Ultor. Capitals crowned each column, often decorated in ornate levels of acanthodes. These arches symbolized the classics of Roman architecture, and tied back to the emperors, as they were first used in Augustus's temples. The attic, or the fourth level, were panels divided by flat composite lenses in the Roman-Corinthian style (Szegedy-Maszak 120). The square windows, or composite lenses, were curved at the top, imitating an arch, paying homage to Rome's mastery of arches. (See Fig. 3) A small rectangular window sat in the center of every second panel (Elkins 254). The grand and

varying styles of the columns reflected the expansion of Roman Architecture, as many of these styles were borrowed and adapted from ancient Greece, one of the many lands conquered by the Romans.

The Coliseum seated over 50,000 spectators, with several grand balconies for the elite. Often, the emperor sat in one of these balconies with his officials to watch and judge the games. The balconies represented the divisions of social classes. Class division was enforced inside the Coliseum. Flights of stairs and corridors were designed to allow easy entrances and exits that divided each social class. The two main entrances lead to central boxes, which branched off into obligatory passageways that led the spectator to his assigned quadrant of the amphitheater (Szegedy-Maszak 120). None of the stairwells or passageways intertwined, and guards were placed at the entrance to ensure division of the elite from the common people. This made it so the classes could not mingle and unite against Vespasian (Elkins 258). The lower class experienced the hardships of his reign, but did not have the resources to rebel. While the elite did have the resources to rebel, they had no reason to do so. By keeping the classes separate, Vespasian prevented civil rebellions, thereby maintaining his authority.

During the games in the Coliseum, the audience was exposed to graphic displays of violence. This scared any potential rebels, showing them what would happen to them if they did rebel. Like a god, Vespasian controlled life and death by choosing the winner and loser of the games. The people loved the entertainment of the games, making both Vespasian and Titus popular in the eyes of the Roman people, thereby maintaining a strong public image. The Coliseum was an imposing structure in terms of magnitude and purpose. The four levels of columns were both impressive and stately, reminding the people of Roman expansion and ability.

Citizens also associated the violence of gladiator fights with the games. According to Plato's theory of Catharsis, which Vespasian knew, when people view violence they no longer have a desire to participate in it (Gilbert 302). This exposure allowed Vespasian to minimize any potential rebellions. The magnificence of the design of the Coliseum and the violence of the games inside reminded the people of Vespasian's, and later Titus', divine power and displayed Roman architectural prowess.

Following Vespasian's death in 79 A.D., his son, Titus, became the new emperor, and continued to use architecture as a means for power and control. He was left to clean up after the First Jewish War and establish his own divine power. The Jewish Wars, born from religious tension, started with the Roman raid of the Second Jewish Temple and public execution of six thousand Jews in Jerusalem. Jewish rebels declared war in 66 C.E., but were defeated by Titus during the Fall of Jerusalem in 70 C.E. (Curran 76).

After the war, Titus needed to reinstate his power over the Jewish people. At the foot of the Palatine Hill, he constructed the Arch of Titus. Rome was built on the Palatine hill, right next to the Tiberius River. This placed the arch on trade routes through Rome (Rutgers 103), forcing all traders to pass under the arch and to view the reliefs. The location of the Arch is symbolic. By placing it over a busy trade route, it reminded people that, just as they walk under the arch, they were under Titus' complete control. It held the record of Titus' and his father's victories during the Jewish War, and commemorated Titus' divinity. The relief of the raid of the Temple reminds Jewish traders that, despite their god, Titus had complete divine and military power over them. This arch not only frightened the Jews into submission, but also other conquered people. The defeat of the Jews warned others not to rebel, and that if they did, Titus would subdue them as

well. On the south side of the arch is a relief depicting the violent plundering of the Temple Menorah in Jerusalem. (See Fig. 4) By raiding the temple, Titus crushed the Jewish rebellion in a single act. This displayed his military power and wisdom to the people. The north side depicts Titus riding on a chariot in the triumphal procession of Roman soldiers down Rome's Sacred Way. (See Fig. 5) The fact that he is in a chariot is a godlike image, as the Romans were accustomed to gods being depicted in a similar fashion. For example, the Pantheon's portico displayed the gods in chariots and wearing Roman armor. Also, statues of gods wore Roman clothing, and held spears and other Roman objects (MacDonald 100). In the relief, Titus is decorated in gold and other precious metals to illustrate his divinity. Many paintings and depictions of Jupiter are inlaid with gold, symbolizing that Titus, like Jupiter, is a god. Gold itself is a symbol of wealth and power reserved for the elite. The gold decorations on Titus were meant to remind the people that Titus was above them and therefore had the right to rule them. The top of the arch bears the inscription:

“SENATUS
POPULUS QUE ROMANUS
DIVO TITO DIVI VESPASIANI F
VESPASIANO AUGUSTO” ,

which translates to “The Senate and People of Rome, to Divus Titus, son of Divus Vespasian, Vespasian Augustus” (Cartwright 2). The term “Divus” means divine, reminding the people that both the father and son emperors were gods. The inscription glorifies the two emperors and honors their accomplishments. The arch stands as a symbol of Roman power, specifically Titus’.

The arch of Titus displayed Titus' divine authority and military prowess through its reliefs, inscriptions, and decorations.

Some scholars argue that the purpose behind Roman architecture was simply religion and governmental function. They state that the temples, like the Roman Pantheon, were constructed to worship the gods, and the Coliseum was built just for gladiator fights and entertainment. However, the Emperors, through their education, knew the violence would suppress rebellions based off Plato's theory of Catharsis. This theory states that the viewing of violent acts fulfills the human need to commit violent acts. The gladiator fights, put on by the Emperors, fulfilled this Catharsis. Other scholars argue that the Res Gestae of Augustus and the Arch of Titus were simply records of the Roman Empire's history (Hunt 200). However, the Emperors themselves controlled the location, placement, and detail of the structures and text. History has always been written from the victor's perspective. However, the Emperors put history through a divine and perfected filter that portrayed them as gods.

Displaying the Emperor's divine power, maintaining political and military authority, and showing Rome's architectural prowess drove the construction of Roman buildings by decree of the Emperors. As more and more information is uncovered about the reasons behind their design, a greater understanding of the techniques Roman Emperors used to maintain their power and public image is revealed. To this day, architecture is still used to symbolize power. Skyscrapers dominate every major city skyline in America. They show the power of companies and capitalism through their height and design. Since they are so expensive to build and maintain, skyscrapers show the wealth of companies. The wealthier the company, the higher and more elaborate the skyscraper might be. Most major businesses have large skyscrapers as their

headquarters, to show the development and success of the corporation. In 1970, Sears constructed the Sears Tower. At the time Sears was the biggest retailer in the world, employing three hundred and fifty thousand employees and earning one billion dollars monthly. They used their wealth and power to construct the skyscraper. When the skyscraper was completed in 1974, it was the tallest building in the world. With 110 stories it stood five hundred and twenty meters high (Michon). Today, it is still the second tallest building in America.

Not only do businesses use architecture to display power, but also governments. Although they were built some time ago, the White House and The Capitol building are viewed as some of the most powerful buildings in the world. In fact, the White House uses the Tuscan Doric columns from Roman Architecture to display its power and authority. The Capitol building uses the Imperial architectural style also from Roman architecture, with tall columns at the entrance that hold up the architrave. Inside is a large free-standing dome ceiling with a star at the center. The star symbolizes freedom and refers to the American flag, a symbol of the government. This dome symbolizes the placement of freedom and the government at the center of the U.S. Just like in Ancient Rome, modern architecture is still used to display power today.

Fig. 1:

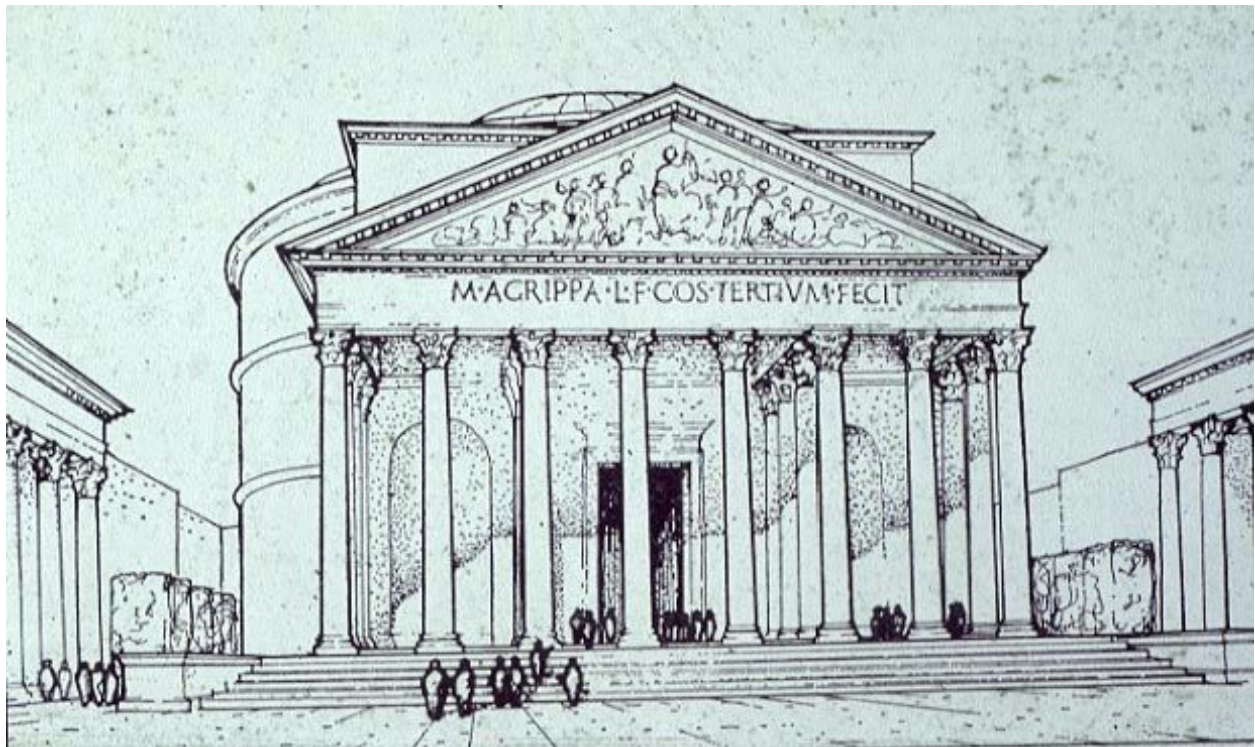


Fig 2:

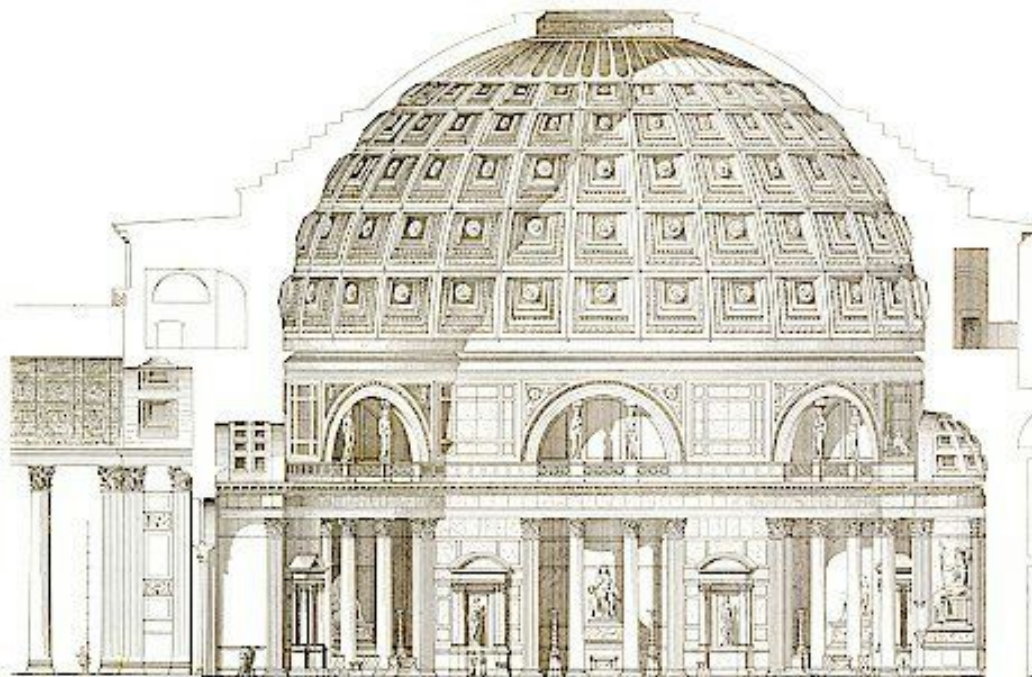


Fig. 3:

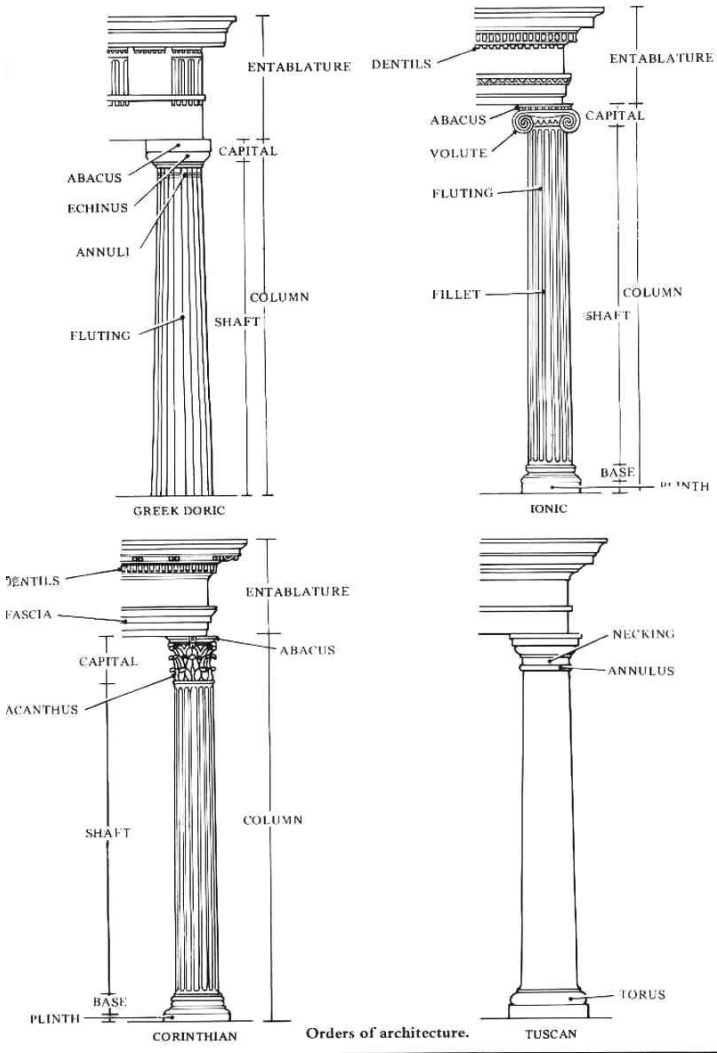
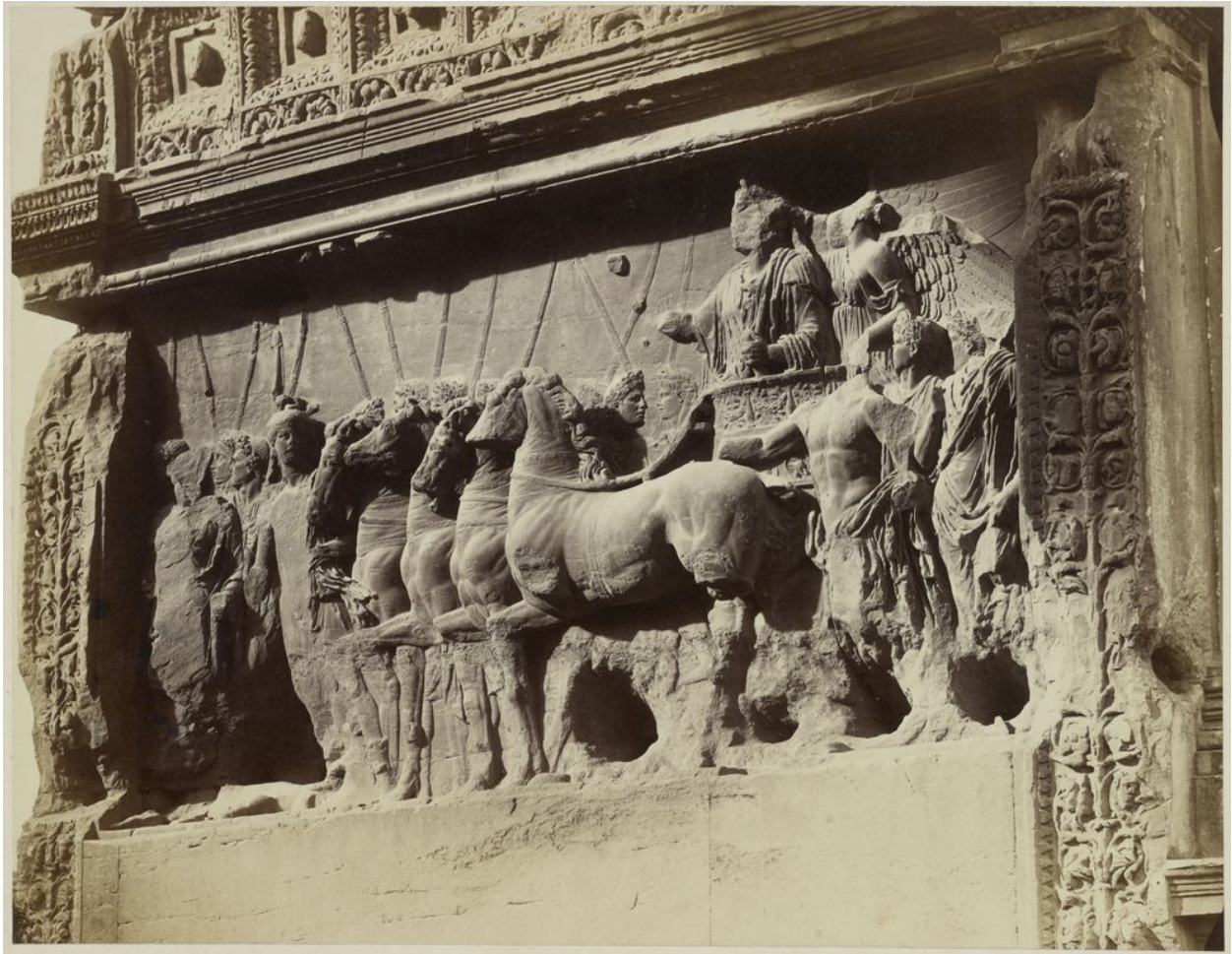


Fig. 4:



Fig. 5:



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